

To the Public Health Committee:

Rep. Mitch Bolinek (R-106) has characterized Southbury Training School (STS) as a "less dignified, warehouse-like" setting that offers "fewer opportunities for personal fulfillment and personalized, engaged care." My sister Helen Phillips and I have visited many times since becoming guardians of our brother Duncan, and we emphatically disagree.

Duncan's intellectual disability became apparent at an early age, and he was placed in a privately-owned school that had been recommended by our family doctor and other professionals. He lived there for 21 years, but then it closed and forced our mother to look for another school. At the time STS was still open to new admissions, and he entered in March 1964---51 years ago---and has lived there ever since. We know from personal observation that, thanks to STS, he is healthy, happy, and well cared for.

He is now 76, deaf, and unable to speak intelligibly to Helen or me, though STS's staff (unlike those at some group homes) has years of training and experience, and no problem communicating with him. We have to wonder how long it would take the staff anywhere else to interact successfully with him, especially as his health needs will inevitably increase in his old age?

STS's staff keeps us informed of developments in his health and everyday life, and through them he has gotten part-time work with Easter Seals; he enjoys it and the sense of accomplishment in a job well done.

In addition, he has ample opportunities for recreation and joins other STS residents in trips to the beach and sports events; and despite his disability, he enjoys going to Mass every Sunday.

Finally, STS's staff has long encouraged his talent for drawing, and his pictures are exhibited in the art shows held there every October.

Far from disparaging STS as a "warehouse" (thereby falsely implying indifference and neglect), we think it should be hailed as a minimum standard of care for every disabled person.

And instead of encouraging the equally false---and contradictory---impression that the funds spent on STS are somehow "spoiling" the remaining residents (compared to the hardships of those on the waiting list), why not reopen it to new admissions and update its facilities---which include a dental clinic and a planned medical clinic---to reduce or even eliminate the number on the waiting list?

Southbury Training School is a priceless and irreplaceable resource whose reckless abandonment would be a tragedy and a disaster for future generations of those unfortunate enough to be disabled through no fault of their own.

Al Raymond